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Chairman: Mr. Penke ..... (Latvia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 62: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/64/38)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/64/79-E/2009/74; A/64/151, 152, 164, 190 and 342)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/64/218)

1. **Ms. Shinohara** (Japan) said that her country was working to create a gender-equal society and promoting women's empowerment on the basis of internationally agreed principles and instruments. It was crucial to promote gender mainstreaming in every phase of United Nations activities. Japan supported the establishment of a new gender entity, underscoring the need to avoid duplication and fragmentation, and the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence and armed conflict and the enhancement of women's participation in the peacebuilding process.

2. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had examined Japan's sixth report in July 2009, welcoming positive steps, such as the appointment of a Minister for Gender Equality, and pointing out areas where more progress was needed, such as women's participation in the decision-making process. At present, 11.3 per cent of members of the House of Representatives were women, the highest proportion yet achieved.

3. The fifteen-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would be undertaken at the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010. In response to the previous session, Japan, together with the United Nations Development Programme, had held a symposium to discuss unpaid care work. Japan would take the anniversary as an opportunity to renew its commitment to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. **Ms. Rovirosa** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, called upon States to participate at the highest level in the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women and to confirm their commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. She noted that the Secretary-General's successful Unite to End Violence against Women campaign could serve to coordinate actions by Governments, civil society, community organizations, the private sector and the media.

5. Gender equality and women's empowerment were key factors for social development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making and in public office, including at the highest levels of government and in the economic, cultural and social sectors, should remain a national and international priority.

6. Member countries of the Rio Group were enacting laws on gender equality. Their institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women participated in the design of public policies with cooperation from international and regional organizations, civil society and community organizations. International organizations and the developed countries should support national programmes for women's equality and empowerment, and specific actions should be taken at all levels to prevent and eradicate violence against women. Latin American and Caribbean countries had been pioneers in developing instruments and mechanisms in that area.

7. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) had created a Gender Equality Observatory and subregional mechanisms for women, including the Council of Central American Ministers for Women's Affairs, and had contributed to developing a broad agenda of gender issues in the region. The eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean would be held in Brazil in 2010, coinciding with the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. One of the central themes of the Conference would be equality of opportunities for economic development and the impacts of the economic and financial crisis on gender equality.

8. The International Day of Rural Women would be celebrated on 15 October. In many of the Rio Group's member States, rural women, including indigenous women, represented a large part of the population and had made a significant contribution to development. Nevertheless, rural women continued to face broad challenges throughout the world and the international

community should intensify its efforts to empower them.

9. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) carried out important activities in partnership with Governments, civil society and other United Nations funds and programmes. Any methodology adopted for the allocation of resources to UNIFEM regional offices should include specific indicators for the advancement and empowerment of women. Lastly, the Rio Group hoped that the constructive consultations for preparation of a new gender architecture would continue. Its member countries were committed to ensuring the empowerment and equality of women as it was impossible to overcome underdevelopment and social exclusion while gender differences persisted.

10. **Ms. Ellis** (Australia), speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, said that the Forum's Regional Security Committee had recently discussed sexual and gender-based violence. It was a serious violation of human rights which caused trauma to women, limited their community participation and strained national economies, undermining efforts to end poverty in the region. Raising awareness of the link between women's economic empowerment and peace and security was a necessary step for eradicating sexual violence.

11. The Forum had strengthened its resolve to end permissive attitudes to sexual violence and to place sexual and gender-based violence on the political agenda. It welcomed efforts at the local, national and regional levels to address that issue and called on the United Nations system to strengthen its resolve to collect evidence-based data to support accounts of sexual and gender-based violence.

12. The Forum welcomed the efforts to create a new gender entity and the commitment to include women in peacebuilding and address sexual violence in conflict situations. The view held by some Governments and military personnel that gender-based violence was a by-product of war was intolerable. All States should build judicial and security institutions to prevent and prosecute sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated in conflict situations.

13. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that despite technological advances and human development, women continued to suffer discrimination and exclusion in terms of jobs, credit, capital markets and basic services. Their work was often informal, unmeasured and poorly paid, and their abilities far from utilized, despite their contribution to the economic survival of poor households and overall economic input.

14. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly remained the guiding policy framework for all States. Yet progress towards meeting the two Millennium Development Goals that were linked to women was slow. The global economic crisis had aggravated the feminization of poverty and violence against women was a major impediment to women's social and economic development. Synergies should be developed between the new gender entity and the intergovernmental process for system-wide coherence.

15. Pakistan's Constitution guaranteed all citizens equality before the law, and women participated in all areas of life. Pakistan had elected the first woman Prime Minister in the Muslim world and had selected the first woman speaker of a National Assembly in South Asia. Women accounted for 17 per cent of senators and 22.5 per cent of members of the Lower House.

16. Pakistan's initiatives to eliminate exploitation and discrimination against women included the adoption of the Protection of Women Act; an income support programme for women heads of household; a gender reform action plan focused on gender mainstreaming; and a youth development programme providing training stipends for young people, particularly girls. A Gender Crime Cell had been established, and there was zero tolerance of violence against women. Women's centres and shelters were being expanded, and the National Assembly would soon consider a bill on protection against workplace harassment. The private sector and the media helped to promote awareness of women's rights.

17. Gender equality and women's empowerment could be achieved only through international cooperation and global partnerships. Financial resources were needed for women's education, health and job creation in order to eliminate gender disparities. The international community should honour its commitment to official development assistance and offer debt relief and open markets to give opportunities to women.

18. **Mr. Bashir** (Iraq) said that the new Iraqi State was founded on equality of rights and obligations, the protection of women's rights being central to the country's national strategy. Numerous national institutions had been set up to raise women's awareness and educate them concerning their rights. The Government also intended to establish a national centre for the protection of Iraqi women against violence, under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, as well as assistance and guidance centres for women. The Government had conducted consciousness-raising campaigns in the media on female circumcision and crimes of honour with a view to criminalizing and putting a stop to those phenomena. New legislative provisions set prison penalties for forced marriage and trafficking in human beings, in particular women.

19. The promotion of the empowerment of women was best evidenced by Iraq's adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Cairo Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The women of Iraq had shown great courage and ability in the face of terrorism and violence. They had participated in elections and also, by virtue of the public offices that they had come to occupy after moving from oppression to freedom and democracy, in the drafting of the Constitution. The granting by the United States Secretary of State of one of eight International Women of Courage awards to an Iraqi woman in 2008 was a testament to the courage and activism of the country's women.

20. Iraq's new Constitution, the most advanced in the region in terms of support for human rights, especially women's rights, strengthened equality between women and men before the law, forbidding discrimination on grounds of sex and guaranteeing suitable housing and incomes for women. It also called for at least 25 per cent female membership in Parliament, a rate that had surpassed 30 per cent in Iraqi Kurdistan. Women currently held three ministerial portfolios. Moreover, numerous laws guaranteed women's rights in the areas of family, work, social protection and health care and enhanced the role of the High-level National Committee for the Advancement of Iraqi Women through the creation of a mechanism to follow up national strategies in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

21. The abolition of the ban on travel by Iraqi women without a male relative; the increase in the number of women working in the foreign service; awareness-raising courses on gender, empowerment and other women-related issues held in various institutions; recognition of outstanding women in sports and other areas; and the provision of Government support to low-income and immigrant households, especially women-headed households, were all signs of advances in women's rights in the new Iraq. Lastly, he said that the people of Iraq were in need of support from States and regional and international organizations in continuing to improve security and build Iraqi society, including with regard to women, and expressed the gratitude of his Government to all those that had assisted Iraq.

22. **Ms. Sapag** (Chile) said that his delegation welcomed the progress made in implementing some of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's 2006 in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122 and Add.1). The adoption of Security Council resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009) on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict reflected a new determination to deal with those issues. Her country supported all the efforts made to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and related instruments on sexual violence against children and recommended that women should be included at the negotiating table in peace processes.

23. Conscious of women's role as agents of change and peacebuilders, Chile had launched a national plan of action to comply with Security Council resolution 1325 (2004) on women and peace and security. It was a pioneering strategy in Latin America, with measures to protect women in situations of armed conflict and incentives for their participation in the peace process. She welcomed the increase in contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund to support measures to eliminate violence against women.

24. The Millennium Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality was the Goal towards which the least progress had been made. Chile's indicators in that area were good and the country was participating in a regional campaign of horizontal cooperation to reduce maternal and child mortality in vulnerable groups. She shared the concern expressed by the delegation of Mexico that any methodology for resource allocation

to the regional offices of UNIFEM should be established in consultation with the region and include indicators reflecting the reality of women in the region. Chile looked forward to a comprehensive report on system-wide coherence and supported the efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

25. Her Government was implementing a pro-gender equity agenda for the period 2006-2010. Initiatives included the establishment of a basic pension for housewives, with bonuses for mothers; the expansion of nursery facilities, an increase in the minimum wage for women domestic workers, and the provision of women's centres and shelters for victims of domestic violence.

26. **Ms. Zhang** Dan (China) said that the current global financial crisis had brought daunting challenges for gender equality and women's enjoyment of basic rights such as health, employment and education. The international community should formulate policies and programmes incorporating the gender perspective, taking the views of women's organizations into account.

27. The United Nations should play a greater role in responding to the crisis and promoting gender equality. The international community should increase its assistance to developing countries to help them maintain economic and social stability and safeguard the basic rights and interests of women and children. China welcomed the decision to consolidate existing United Nations gender bodies into a new composite entity. Reform in areas such as governance and funding should also lead to progress in economic and social development.

28. China had incorporated women's development into its overall national development plan and was working on the prevention of domestic violence, abduction and trafficking in women and children and on support for human rights. Efforts had been made to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship, provide support to rural women and safeguard women's rights and interests, including by eliminating violence against women. Chinese institutions such as rights protection courts, legal aid centres for women, domestic violence complaint centres and women's shelters had made a significant contribution.

29. **Mr. Chidyausiku** (Zimbabwe) said that comprehensive measures for securing gender equality and protecting women's human rights in line with national and international frameworks were of paramount importance. Zimbabwe thus supported the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It had given priority to Millennium Development Goal 3 in particular and set out policies and programmes to help improve the status of women and girls. The implementation of binding international instruments like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and regional instruments such as an African Union Protocol on Women's Rights were critical to help women to enjoy and exercise their full and equal rights.

30. Zimbabwe's commitment to the advancement and empowerment of women was evident through its adoption of a national gender policy to promote gender mainstreaming in 2000 and the recent submission of its combined report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It had also enacted laws to promote the legal status of women and protect their inheritance rights, criminalize the wilful transmission of HIV/AIDS and marital rape, expand maternal rights and equal employment opportunities. The Government had adopted a domestic violence law in 2007 to protect survivors of gender-based violence and employed a multisectoral approach to the problem, involving various stakeholders.

31. His country still faced obstacles, however, in capturing data and establishing an effective and efficient statistical office to track domestic violence. The United Nations and donors should thus provide the necessary resources and training to strengthen data collection and analysis. Zimbabwe was leading a consultative process to draw up a comprehensive national law preventing trafficking in women and children. He noted with concern that a number of those victims were women migrant workers and called on the United Nations and other relevant institutions to raise awareness and forge new partnerships and cooperation in that area.

32. The confluence of the financial, economic, fuel and food crises and climate change further exacerbated the inequalities and discrimination that women faced, particularly those living in rural areas. In that respect, his Government sought to enhance women's

participation in key sectors of the economy such as mining, agriculture, industry and commerce, including through the establishment of a quota for women under the land reform programme and through loans in the agricultural sector.

33. For those measures to be successful, however, the illegal unilateral coercive sanctions imposed on his country should be lifted, as they harmed the economically disadvantaged. Lastly, his delegation generally supported the establishment of a composite gender entity, provided it would have a strong field presence to support countries in implementing their commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in line with national priorities. He emphasized that programmes for women should not be sacrificed in the process of reforming the United Nations.

34. **Mr. Arthur** (Norway) said that in many countries women and girls were still at the margins of society and deprived of their human rights to health, education, land ownership and inheritance, which made them vulnerable to violence and abuse. The price was paid by the entire population in real economic and development terms, as the Human Development Report showed the strong correlation between gender equality and growth and prosperity.

35. School enrolment rates and demographic statistics were clear indicators: fewer girls than boys attended school, and fewer girls survived childhood. Girls were not wanted or not fed or not given the care that they needed. Women died from childbirth complications because of the lack of basic health care. The Millennium Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality was under-funded and under-supported. Norway's 2010 budget would sustain its development assistance at 1 per cent of gross national income. One third of Norway's bilateral aid focused on policies for the advancement of women.

36. Even when countries had appropriate legislation and gender-sensitive policies, the entrenched attitudes of men were still an impediment to progress. A number of strategies should be pursued with regard to violence against women, including the provision of protection, medical care, legal advice and support services for victims. Perpetrators should be brought to justice, and boys and men should be engaged in the efforts to change attitudes and stereotypes that perpetuated inequalities.

37. Despite measures taken by intergovernmental bodies for gender equality and women's empowerment, a wide gap persisted between intentions and results. Mainstreaming of gender issues meant that girls should be given special protection and attention, as being born a girl was in itself a disadvantage. Boys should be sensitized to gender equality issues at an early stage of life. Lastly, Norway commended the global Unite to End Violence against Women campaign. The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women had received requests for assistance in 2009 totalling $900 million, yet the Fund's available resources were a mere $12 million. His Government hoped to see the new composite gender entity operational by the summer of 2010.

38. **Mr. Webb** (United States of America) said that the United Nations had recently taken significant steps to improve the lives of women and girls, including the adoption in September of Security Council resolution 1888 (2009) to strengthen existing tools to address sexual violence as a tactic of war and the adoption in the previous week of Security Council resolution 1889 (2009) to increase the role and contributions of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The broad support for those resolutions was a clear sign that the international community recognized the link between maintaining international peace and security and preventing and responding to sexual violence against women as a tactic of war and that women must be full participants in peacebuilding.

39. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, had led to changes in laws, attitudes and outcomes, and there was a growing awareness of women's status as a global issue that could not be ignored. Peace, security and economic growth were impossible without women's full and equal participation. Men and boys were important partners in the efforts to empower women. Research had shown the correlation of investments in women with favourable outcomes for economic growth, good governance and democratic progress. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific had reported in 2007 on the huge costs to the region resulting from barriers to women's employment and gender gaps in education.

40. Recent private-sector initiatives included partnerships to improve the lives of women and girls, initiated by the United Nations, individual countries, private sector foundations and academic organizations.

There had also been support from non-traditional allies, including men and religious leaders. In September 2008, on the occasion of the United Nations high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals, the world's religious leaders had made a pledge to help stop violence against women. The Secretary-General had formed a network of male leaders who would work to eliminate violence against women and girls. As the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration approached, it was important to look at creative ways to increase those new partnerships.

41. Member States should also demonstrate their political will. In 2009, the President of the United States had established the White House Council on Women and Girls, which included representatives of all cabinet-level federal agencies. The position of Ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues had also been created.

42. The United States welcomed the resolution on the composite gender entity and planning should begin immediately to build on the momentum of reform. Streamlining work on women's rights and equality into a single entity was in line with the broader interest of making sure that the United Nations could deliver on its mandate. Gender should be mainstreamed throughout the United Nations system. In the face of increasingly interconnected global challenges: poverty, disease, climate change and conflict, the United Nations had to be able to make a real change in people's lives around the world and the new composite entity would be an important part of that broader vision.

43. **Ms. Gendi** (Egypt) said that today's meeting coincided with the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development and preparation for the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It was important to renew all the commitments made for the advancement of women and to make further pledges to support developing countries' capacities to address the impacts of the global crises which negatively impacted the status of women.

44. The new composite entity for gender issues would be a starting point for dealing with women's issues in a coherent and unified manner. In that regard, Member States should make funds available for assisting developing and the least developed countries to fulfil their commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Donor countries should also fulfil their pledges to UNIFEM.

45. Girl-friendly schools had been established throughout the country, in particular at the compulsory primary level. Other achievements included support for women's political empowerment at the local level; the reservation of 56 seats in the national Parliament for women; a nationwide campaign to end violence against women; and the establishment of complaint mechanisms and gender focal points in all government institutions, agencies and ministries. The number of women judges had been increased, particularly in the family courts. Children born to an Egyptian mother or father were granted Egyptian nationality.

46. In 2009, during its presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Egypt had established the NAM Centre for the advancement of women. It was also hosting the new women's agency established by the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The Organization of Arab Women had launched initiatives for gender equality and to fight trafficking in persons. The international campaign "End Human Trafficking Now!" had been supported by civil society, the private sector and the business community, in an effort endorsed by both the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement.

47. **Ms. Hoang Thi Thanh Nga** (Viet Nam) said that her delegation was pleased by the significant progress that had been achieved in raising public awareness around the world on the importance of eliminating discrimination against women and promoting their role in political and economic decision-making. In order to overcome the challenges that remained in that area, gender mainstreaming should be further promoted in all United Nations strategies and programmes, development programmes in particular, and Member States must make further efforts to incorporate the gender perspective into their legal systems, development strategies and all other socio-economic policies.

48. In Viet Nam, public awareness on gender equality and the role of women in socio-economic life had improved considerably, particularly in rural areas, after a law on gender equality and one on the prevention of domestic violence had come into effect in 2007 and in 2008, respectively. Ensuring enhanced participation of

women should not be limited to setting quotas for their representation in governance institutions, but should be evident in their capacity to contribute to decision-making. Women's education and training was key in that regard, and her Government had made great efforts to ensure equal access to education for women and girls and reduce their drop-out rate.

49. Women's economic empowerment played a critical role in achieving gender equality. Over the past five years, income and employment opportunities for women had improved significantly in Viet Nam. Their access to loans had also been enhanced and many micro-credit programmes with women as the major beneficiaries had been implemented effectively in many of the country's provinces. It was hoped that the United Nations would further facilitate efforts to promote women's economic empowerment. Lastly, she commended its initiative to develop a gender marker system pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which allowed decision-makers to track funds allocated to women-centred projects.

50. **Ms. Gomes Bustamante** (Brazil) said that her delegation welcomed the United Nations Secretary-General's campaign Unite to End Violence Against Women, which provided a platform for mobilizing Member States and United Nations agencies to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Brazil had been making steady progress towards the advancement of women through a range of policies, plans and programmes aimed at reducing gender inequalities, promoting social inclusion and social development and combating violence against women, including with participation from all relevant stakeholders.

51. Those measures addressed issues like the sexual exploitation of women and trafficking in young women and girls, protecting the human rights of women in prison as well as sexual, reproductive and maternity rights, and actions aimed at more vulnerable groups like rural workers, indigenous women and women of African descent. Enactment of the Maria da Penha Law, which helped women who were victims of violence to seek support and bring perpetrators to trial, had been a major breakthrough in curbing violence against women. Over 125,000 women had received support in that context since 2006.

52. Brazil had implemented a plan to combat trafficking in persons, which focused on prevention, and bringing perpetrators to justice. However, since the main victims of trafficking were young women and girls from the poorest regions, developed countries — the main destination of women victims — also had an important role to play in ending the problem. The Government was also deeply concerned by the feminization of HIV/AIDS and had specific programmes in place to reduce the vulnerability of women and teenagers to HIV, providing treatment to all those requiring it, including through free and universal access to drugs.

53. Women's participation in leading positions, including in the high ranks of Government, must be increased. She welcomed the establishment of a new composite entity under the direct responsibility of the Secretary-General through General Assembly resolution 63/311. That body would need adequate and stable funding to be effective, including through resources currently being allocated through the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to the regional offices, and adequate mechanisms to ensure Member States' oversight of its activities.

54. **Ms. Abdelrahman** (Sudan) said that the stability brought by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had enabled Sudanese women, who had gained the right to vote in 1954 and the right to stand for election in 1964, to win 25 per cent of the seats in the legislative assembly in 2008. They currently held 11 per cent of high leadership positions in the civil service, 6.8 per cent of federal ministerial posts, 8 per cent of posts of minister of state and 18.6 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly. In the civil service 22 per cent of intermediate supervisory posts and 66 per cent of all secretarial administrative posts were occupied by women. In the private sector, women were entirely free to own and engage in commercial enterprises, the level of participation of women being 54 per cent.

55. The State, believing in the pioneering role of women in community-building and their importance in production, especially in rural areas, had established a National Committee for the Advancement of Women and, to facilitate the Committee's task, had drafted a national policy designed chiefly for gender mainstreaming, improving health care and encouraging and facilitating marriage to promote healthy practices and family cohesion and help prevent divorce stemming from poverty. There was a national policy aimed at bridging the gender gap in basic education by 2010, achieving universal basic education for both

sexes by 2015 and increasing vocational and technical education and training opportunities for girls, which had permitted a 35 per cent increase in women's participation in the labour market. To improve the condition of rural women, the Government had opened windows for the export of their products, while the National Plan for the Empowerment of Women sought to include more women under social security. The laws aimed at ending violence against women had been strengthened, and a unit had been created within the Ministry of Justice to monitor the effort to combat such violence, including in conflict zones.

56. Women had played an effective part in peacebuilding in eastern Sudan as well as in the South. As a result, many women had moved up to prominent positions, one of them as assistant to the President of the Republic. That trend was clear from the course of the peace process since the Oslo Donor Conference, after which the Women's Centre for Peace and Development had been established to coordinate women's efforts in peacebuilding, so that women were currently playing a role of equal importance to that of men in establishing peace in Darfur. Sudan had a cultural heritage and a value system that emphasized equality and justice between the sexes and the importance of women's role in nation-building. The transitional Constitution therefore fully guaranteed their political, civil, social, cultural and economic rights, including the right to equal pay and other employment benefits.

57. International assistance remained essential to the realization of the Millennium Development Goal of empowering women, ending violence against them and preserving their dignity. The role of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in helping countries achieve that and other Millennium Goals within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action was laudable, as was its pioneering role in capacity-building in many developing countries, including the Sudan. Also to be commended was the Fund's cooperation with other United Nations agencies in preventing the spread of AIDS and achieving United Nations goals relating to the empowerment of women. All partners and donors were urged to double their contributions to the Fund to further its work of improving the status of women and ending violence against them everywhere.

58. Notwithstanding the gains made, the challenges to the advancement of women, especially rural women, had increased in view of the crises facing the world, thus making it even more necessary than before for donor countries to meet their agreed commitments, pardon the debts of the least developed countries and lift economic sanctions against developing countries, including the Sudan. It was also imperative to awaken the world's conscience to the suffering of women whose rights were being violated under foreign occupation in Palestine and to move the international community to act to preserve their rights and their dignity.

59. **Mr. Borg** (Malta) said that, while his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union, he wished to reiterate that any position taken or recommendations made regarding women's empowerment and gender equality in relation to sexual reproductive health and rights should not create any obligation for any party to consider abortion as a legitimate form of reproductive health rights, services or commodities. In that sense, his Government did not view the terms "sexual reproductive health and rights", "reproductive rights" and "reproductive health services" as signifying abortion, or the imposition of that practice on Malta or its Constitution. National legislation considered the termination of pregnancy through induced abortion as illegal and did not recognize abortion as a family planning measure.

60. Malta was committed to the advancement of women in all social and economic spheres of society and had taken measures to integrate the gender perspective into its development strategies. Gender mainstreaming was a priority for his Government and had been strengthened within the national agenda to ensure equal opportunities in the development, application, analysis and monitoring of all its laws, policies and programmes. Malta was promoting women's advancement, for example, by empowering them to participate in the labour market, addressing the situation of persons at risk of poverty, and helping both women and men suffering from violence.

61. Malta's Constitution guaranteed the equality of women and men in the enjoyment of all economic, cultural, civil and political rights, and a number of laws had been enacted to protect the rights of women and give support to provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, family legislation had been amended to grant both spouses equal rights and responsibilities towards children and the administration of property acquired during marriage, and public

awareness was being raised regarding gender equality through collaboration with various bodies including trade unions and women's NGOs.

62. In the context of the world economic slowdown, his Government had adopted gender-inclusive measures to stimulate the economy and was committed to addressing the emerging needs of families, employees and businesses. Such measures included fiscal incentives to female employees and were designed to encourage other women to participate in the labour market, child-care services, flexible working arrangements and tackling discriminatory practices and policies in the provision of goods and services in public administration. The Government was also carrying out research on stumbling blocks to female participation in the job market and in decision-making, and on the impact of gender on entrepreneurship, with a view to shaping future policies.

63. **Ms. Hlaing** (Myanmar) said that her country's traditional law and successive State constitutions guaranteed women equal rights with men, and the welfare and advancement of women were never overlooked. Her Government strove to ensure that women continued to enjoy their rights unhindered, and that momentum was sustained with help from the United Nations and local and international non-governmental organizations. Among the various organizations playing an important role in promoting the development of women in Myanmar were its National Committee for Women's Affairs, which carried out activities based on the twelve areas of concern articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action, and its Women's Affairs Federation, which was helping to implement those activities, including a micro-credit scheme for women in need and micro-financing for women affected by Cyclone Nargis.

64. Myanmar's traditions and culture stressed the need to protect women and girls from abuse, including from sexual and gender-based violence. Legislation and measures were in place to prevent such violence and protect its victims. Those found guilty of rape were incarcerated and shunned by society. Gang rape was unimaginable in Myanmar, and allegations that such cases were being carried out with impunity were unfounded. Myanmar also supported the zero-tolerance policy regarding violence against women and girls and was working to ensure that the socio-economic needs and priorities of women were met. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's global campaign to end violence against women.

65. Myanmar was tackling the issue of trafficking in persons by developing a comprehensive framework that included the strengthening of legislation, a national action plan and increasing cooperation at all levels. Its commitment was evident, for example, through the heavy penalties for perpetrators under its Penal Code, its work as a party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, and its participation in the regional Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. Her country had also signed memorandums of understanding to foster a multi-sector response to the human trafficking problem involving other countries in the region. Myanmar's domestic laws were being reviewed to bring them into line with the new State Constitution and the country's obligations under international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

66. **Mr. Çorman** (Turkey) observed that international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the widespread efforts of the international community, including NGOs, had helped achieve progress towards eliminating barriers to the advancement of women and girls, leading to greater awareness on the rights and needs of women, and various Security Council resolutions underlined the importance of women's empowerment as key to sustained international peace. Nevertheless, much remained to be done to ensure universal observance of the rights of women and to overcome the remaining challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

67. As the reforms that Turkey had undertaken in recent years had lifted all legal barriers to gender equality, his Government was focusing on achieving de facto gender equality. In that respect, Turkey had made great strides in mainstreaming gender equality by working with civil society. Bearing in mind the importance of monitoring outcomes related to the advancement of women, his Government had established special committees to address matters relating to health, education, the economy, the environment, poverty and the human rights of women,

and in March that year, had also established a Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

68. His Government had drawn up an action plan, with participation from civil society, for combating domestic violence against women, which would be put into effect in 2010, and awareness-raising campaigns were being conducted with help from the mass media, universities, local administrations and civil society organizations. Turkey was also helping to raise awareness on women's issues at the international level, as evidenced through its hosting of an upcoming international women's congress.

69. **Ms. Pérez Álvarez** (Cuba) said that the increase in the feminization of poverty worldwide remained a cause of serious concern in spite of the progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The main obstacles in achieving the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals included the reduction of official development assistance (ODA), the negative consequences of the structural adjustment programmes, the foreign debt of the countries of the South, and the stagnation of international trade negotiations in the Doha Round.

70. Without sustainable development and a just and equitable international order aimed at eradicating poverty, full gender equality and the empowerment of women would never be achieved. Addressing those inequalities would also require putting an end to unequal trade relations, the imbalance in the exploitation of natural resources, inflation, and irrational military expenditures. The international monetary system must be replaced and the foreign debt of the countries of the South cancelled.

71. The elimination of violence against women also required the elimination of unilateral coercive measures. In that respect, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed unilaterally on Cuba by the United States Government for over half a century constituted an act of genocide and was the main form of violence from which Cuban women and girls suffered. She also denounced the suffering of the mothers, wives and children of five Cubans who had been serving unjust and arbitrary sentences in the United States for 10 years for denouncing the criminal acts of terrorist groups that operated from United States soil against Cuba. Moreover, her Government called on the Government of the United States to issue immediately a humanitarian visa to enable Adriana Pérez O' Connor, the wife of one of the five detainees, Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, to visit her husband. The United States authorities had denied her a visa to visit him 10 times since his arbitrary detention in 1998.

72. Cuba had been working for gender equality and women's empowerment well before the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and had been the first to sign and ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Moreover, women currently held more than 40 per cent of the seats in Cuba's Parliament. Cuba would continue to work to actively engage the issue of system-wide coherence in the United Nations. At the same time, rich countries must understand that the effects of the current economic and financial crises went well beyond the underdeveloped South. Immediate solutions were needed, and more than ever, the right to development was critical in advancing the situation of women in the countries of the South.

73. **Ms. Al-Thani** (Qatar) said that her country approached women's issues holistically. Its general strategy on the family, the basic unit of society, included a national plan for the advancement of women. She commended international efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and called on the United Nations to coordinate its efforts to provide system-wide coherence on the issue. In Qatar, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs had conducted a comprehensive review of relevant national laws relating to domestic violence and had submitted information on State measures taken to address violence against women, for the Secretary-General's database on violence against women.

74. The hotlines that had been set up by a national foundation for the protection of women and children, providing free legal advice to victims and legal aid in courts, had proven to be successful in monitoring cases and providing follow-up in coordination with national agencies in dealing with health questions and criminal and judicial matters. At the international level, the city of Doha had hosted an international seminar on violence against women and its impact on the family in November 2008, with participation from United Nations agencies.

75. Qatar had taken a range of measures to address violence against women migrant workers, including by providing information for the report of the Secretary-General on national actions, through strengthening legal frameworks for addressing that issue and human trafficking and through institutional mechanisms to address the prevention, protection and assistance in relation to such violence. Several national agencies provided training for those working with victims, inter alia by familiarizing them with relevant international conventions.

76. In addition, Qatar was engaged in bilateral cooperation on employment, and continued to provide information to relevant United Nations organizations. Her country had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in April 2008 and would continue its efforts to promote women's empowerment as a strategic objective nationally and internationally. Finally, the relevant reports of the Secretary-General should give special attention to the plight of women and their families living under foreign occupation and the need to find urgent solutions to their plight.

77. **Mr. Rastam** (Malaysia) said that women played an important role in all spheres of society and that all countries had a responsibility to ensure that women could fulfil their potential in any given field. Instituting a gender perspective must continue to be promoted in the international context. States needed to overcome the institutional, traditional and other constraints impeding the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and other internationally agreed instruments. Gender stereotypes continued to be the real barriers to the overall goal of the advancement of women and, as such, merited discussion among the international community, as difficult as that exercise might be for policymakers and others.

78. Malaysia fully supported efforts towards creating a gender balance within the United Nations system and supported the Secretary-General's campaign to end violence against women. His Government had a zero-tolerance policy towards that violence and adopted a holistic approach in addressing it, including by eliminating impunity and prosecuting perpetrators, as well as by providing protection and rehabilitation to victims. Since 2003, it had been implementing gender equality programmes and projects in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and recognized the important role that non-governmental organizations played in complementing governmental efforts, as evidenced through its funding of NGOs for the implementation of activities and programmes for the advancement of women.

79. Malaysia was committed to realizing women's rights as human rights and had instituted changes in its legal and institutional frameworks in that respect. It had made progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 2, with 97 per cent of girls enrolled primary education, and female enrolment in higher education having risen to 60 per cent; Goal 3, as women now comprised more than 20 per cent of the heads of Government ministries, for example; and Goal 5 by reducing maternal mortality from 2.8 per 1,000 live births in 1957 to 0.3 in 2007. Although Malaysia had made strides in reducing malaria and other communicable diseases as part of Goal 6, HIV/AIDS still remained a challenge, especially in the light of the feminization of that disease.

80. Lastly, he stressed that all countries must forge a strong unified political message focusing on the entire spectrum of challenges affecting both developing and developed countries in order to achieve a successful outcome to the various events aimed at women's advancement scheduled for the following year.

81. **Ms. ter Haar** (Netherlands), speaking as a representative of Dutch women, said that women and girls were the best strategic target group to focus on towards achieving the MDGs and eradicating poverty. Sport and physical activity played an important role in the empowerment of women and gender equality. Participating in sport allowed women to develop mental and physical strength, self-confidence and new leadership skills and brought joy to their lives. It was a low-cost healthy and healing activity which could be implemented quickly, and the proper supervision of girls by committed coaches could help increase school participation.

82. Her Government encouraged young girls from migrant backgrounds to participate in sport through targeted financial incentives. That had enabled a group of 700 Muslim women, run by women for women, to become key agents in their local community and was a means of connecting with other communities. Practice had shown that sport was an effective means for reconciliation and dealing with trauma, as evidenced through a football team founded in the Netherlands by a Rwandan woman, which helped female Hutu and

Tutsi survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to combat their trauma and leave the past behind. In Africa, sports infrastructure was a useful channel for educating girls about issues like disease, HIV/AIDS prevention and care and hygiene and sanitation issues and was a means to prevent further isolation of girls having to care for family members living with HIV. It was also a way to overcome stereotypes and issues of caste and class.

83. She drew the Committee's attention to article 13 (c) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and General Assembly resolution 63/135 pertaining to sport and proposed that nations should recognize the cycle of insecurity in women's lives and the need to enhance participation and integration through sport, acknowledge women's vulnerability to violence and the positive influence of sport, and work towards practical solutions to such problems through sport. Lastly, she welcomed the initiatives of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace and called on the Committee to help provide girls and women with equal access to resources and opportunities for participation in sport and to strengthen the role of sport in primary education.

84. **Mr. Merabet** (Algeria) said that his delegation supported General Assembly resolution 63/311 on system-wide coherence, which addressed the establishment of a composite entity for the empowerment of women. Considerable progress had been made in the world thanks to the ambitious commitments made by the international community for gender equality and empowering women mainly within the context of the Beijing Conference and the MDGs. Nevertheless, the multifaceted economic crisis would have repercussions on women's socio-economic situation and would be felt most immediately and disproportionately by poor rural women who would be the first to lose their already precarious jobs or slide into the informal economy. That made them more susceptible to abuse, violence, insecurity and disease, including HIV/AIDS.

85. It was thus imperative to incorporate a gender perspective into any national, regional or international action to combat the crisis and allocate funds and resources to promote gender equality and help women become autonomous. He welcomed the Doha Declaration in that context. The precarious situation resulting from the financial and economic crises posed a double burden for developing countries, particularly in Africa, where special attention should be paid through support for the African Union's gender policy, plan of action and proposal for an African women's decade.

86. Algeria continued to make significant efforts in its pursuit of gender equality, including through its revised Constitution, the lifting of its reservation on article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and its amendment of the Algerian nationality code to recognize the Algerian nationality of children born to Algerian mothers. Women in Algeria had played a key role in achieving equality, and Algeria's President would continue to appoint women to key positions in his Administration and had called for the establishment of a commission to propose a draft law to help enhance the political participation of women in elected bodies.

87. **Ms. Hjartardóttir** (Iceland) said that, as women played a central role in economic and social development and strong links existed between their empowerment and poverty reduction, the advancement of women must be central to the work of the United Nations. Governments had the responsibility of safeguarding women and children from discrimination in the current economic and financial crisis. Concerted international cooperation was also needed to help combat the trafficking in women and girls, as the recession threatened to exacerbate such human rights violations. In that respect, Iceland had recently adopted a national action plan to combat such trafficking, which included measures to protect victims.

88. Women and girls remained subject to persistent and grave gender-based violence throughout the world and continued to be targets and victims of injustice, assault and sexual violence in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations. Impunity for atrocities committed against women and children must be adequately addressed. Her country reaffirmed its strong commitment to the urgent eradication of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and children.

89. It was important to see women as rights-holders rather than as a vulnerable group and to ensure them equal opportunities and participation in policy- and decision-making, especially relating to peace and conflict-resolution. In that respect, she hoped that

compliance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security would be enhanced and also draw attention to a range of related Security Council resolutions including 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009). Iceland would work towards the full implementation of those resolutions and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and urged any States that had not yet signed and ratified the Convention to do so. Lastly, her country supported the establishment of a strong United Nations composite entity for gender equality headed by an Under-Secretary-General and urged the Secretary-General to proceed swiftly in that regard.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.